

How to Get the Most From the Social Security Death Index (SSDI)

One of the first databases new family history researchers use is the Social Security Death Index (SSDI). Why? Because it is online and it is free. But the SSDI has some distinct drawbacks because of some of its inconsistencies. This Quick-sheet explains the background of the SSDI, what data is in it, the inconsistencies, and where it can be searched.

Background

The SSDI started as an electronic resource in 1962. The great majority of entries are for those who died after 1962. There are some in the database whose date of death was as far back as 1937. Some legal aliens and railroad retirees are included in the database.

A person may appear in the database if their death is reported and the person had a Social Security number, not always a certainty. But those two factors are mandatory.

Data in the SSDI

- Last name - for names with an apostrophe, it is omitted. For example, O'Brien is entered as OBrien
- First name - middle names are not included. After 1988, middle initials were included.
- Social Security Number - it is entered as ###-##-####
- State issued - this is the state where the number was issued, not applied for. If the person lived near a state border, or if the local Social Security office had another office process applications, the issuance state may be different than the person's state of residence
- Year issued
- Birth date
- Death date - prior to 1988, the day of death was not included, only the month and year
- Last residence - where the person was last known to be living when the benefit was applied for. About 20% of the entries do not include this information
- Last benefit location - either the last residence or the location where the final lump sum payment was received

Anomalies and Inconsistencies

As previously stated, the death date did not include the day of death prior to 1988. And some databases put in the first day of the month in those cases which is erroneous. Very few people who died before 1962 are included. And again, it does not include every person who died in the United States. They had to have a Social Security number and their death had to be reported.

Can Errors be Fixed?

Yep. Take the death certificate that includes accurate information for your person to the local Social Security office.

Where Can I Search the SSDI?

Ancestry	U.S., Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014
Genealogy Bank	Social Security Death Index (SSDI)
FamilySearch	United States Social Security Death Index
Fold3	Social Security Death Index
National Archives	Social Security NUMIDENT Files, 1936-2007
Steve Morse	Searching the Social Security Death Index (SSDI) in One Step
MyHeritage	U.S. Social Security Death Index (SSDI)
FindMyPast	Social Security Death Index